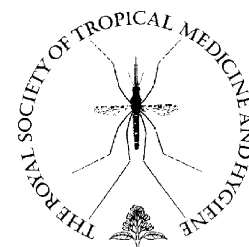




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BOOK REVIEW

Traditional Medicinal Plants and Malaria

Merlin Willcox, Gerard Bodeker, Philippe Rasoanaivo (Eds). Traditional Herbal Medicines for Modern Times series, Roland Hardman (Ed.). CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2004. xxviii + 432 pp., hardback, ISBN: 0-415-30112-2, (£60.99/US\$99.95; £30.50 to addresses in India, Pakistan and Africa, if an account is set to receive a discount this will be received in addition to the special price: see <http://www.giftsofhealth.org/ritam/public.htm>)

This interesting and informative book deals with the entire field of antimalarial and antivectoral natural products, with much disperse material collected into a single volume. We meet old friends like the cinchona alkaloids and the pyrethrins, and also newcomers like *Artemisia annua*, unknown to western medicine 30 years ago. Other effective and safe treatments undoubtedly exist, and need to be elevated from traditional to global use.

The dissimilarity between the fields of traditional herbal medicine and the pharmacomedical system of the industrialized world is handled well, recognizing the differences, holding that advantages and disadvantages attach to both, and attempting scholarly resolution where possible. It is not always straightforward to apply the principles of 'western' scientific methods to research into herbal medicines, and the approach is careful and sensitive. Under clinical studies, the point is made that follow-up is often too short, that outcomes are frequently non-standard and may not reflect clinical response. Helpful guidelines are included to improve and standardize research methodology. Given the importance of these factors in measuring the efficacy of

any malaria treatment, whatever its provenance, the book does good service to the continued development of natural product research. Claims that traditional medicine, for example, is more holistic and psychologically more effective are indeed supportable, but do not detract from the need to kill the malaria parasite, without damaging the host. Melding of these different approaches to the malaria problem is much needed, and is a unique characteristic of this book.

The importance of property rights recurs in several chapters and underlines the need to protect the providers of traditional medicine. Similarly, in several sections attention is focused on the optimal strategy for investigating a herbal treatment, in a quite revolutionary way. Screening experiments in animals or in the *Plasmodium falciparum* in vitro model have produced a substantial literature, although this is of limited usefulness if work does not progress to human malaria patients. But observational studies of traditional malaria treatments do not present insurmountable ethical problems, and the book presents a new concept: that investigations should start, rather than end, with the clinical study of traditional treatment. The book is full of new visions for traditional medicine: this is what makes it such an enjoyable read for the interested observer and an extremely useful reference work.

Bill Watkins
1 Forge Cottages, Mudford, Somerset, UK
E-mail address: bwatkins@btinternet.com

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